

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Reception in San Francisco, California

October 15, 2009

The President. Nancy Pelosi! Hello, San Francisco! Hey! How are you? Hello! It's good to see all of you. Thank you. Just a couple of quick special thank yous—I love all of you, but there are a couple people I want to make sure to acknowledge.

First of all, thank you Tracy Chapman for performing tonight—love Tracy Chapman. Lieutenant Governor John Garamendi, who is running for the California 10 upcoming election—everybody has got to go out there and work for John. There he is right—stand up, John, so everybody can see you. Fantastic.

Let me tell you about Nancy Pelosi. Somebody in an introduction was saying, everybody has a kind word to say about Nancy Pelosi, her generosity, her intelligence—all that's true. Let me talk to you, Nancy Pelosi is tough. *[Laughter]* I want everybody to know that. I mean, every day—every day—she is subjected to constant criticism and griping. And then there's the other party. *[Laughter]*

But with style and grace, but most importantly, with steely determination, she does not back down. She is there doing battle each and every day on behalf of not only her constituency here in California but people all across America who are looking for a fair shake, who are looking for a decent job, who are looking for quality health care, who want a good education for their kids, who want a planet that they can pass on to their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren. That's what Nancy Pelosi is all about. We could not have done any of the stuff that we've done this year without one of the best Speakers imaginable. So please, everybody, I know sometimes you're not a prophet in your own land, but I want everybody to understand how special Nancy Pelosi is and give her a big round of applause.

It's good to be back in California.

Audience member. We love you!

The President. I love you too. I appreciate the warm welcome, especially the weather. *[Laughter]* It just got cold in DC, so I was happy flying in over the bay, and it's sunny, it's nice. *[Laughter]* This is a pretty place you guys live. But obviously, what I appreciate even more is the opportunity that you've given me and my administration to serve on your behalf. And I'm here to tell you that we are keeping faith with your support. We are working every single day to fulfill your hopes. Every day we're asking ourselves, how can we realize the dreams that led so many people to join our cause when it seemed so improbable?

But I've got to say, looking out at a room full of so many supporters, I am reminded of what President Lincoln once said to one of his own supporters who claimed that it was his efforts that made the difference in the election. The guy had come in, he met Lincoln, he said, "It's because of you—it's because of me that you're sitting here." "So you think you made me President?" Lincoln said. "Yes," the man replied, "under Providence, I think I did." "Well," said Lincoln, "it's a pretty mess you've got me into. But I forgive you." *[Laughter]* That's how I feel about you. *[Laughter]* You're all forgiven.

It's been about 10 months since the Obama family packed up and moved to Washington. And I want to report to you that Malia and Sasha are doing great. Michelle has been extraordinary as First Lady. We have Bo, which has lowered my seniority to fifth at the dinner table. [Laughter]

But I do think it's important for all of us to remember—even though it's been almost a year—what was happening in this country when we walked through that front door, because, you know, people seem to have a sort of selective memory. [Laughter] People seem to forget; they seem to think that suddenly, I was sworn in and there was this big financial crisis. [Laughter] So let's just do a little walk down memory lane. [Laughter]

We were facing an economic crisis unlike any that we've seen in our times. We were losing 700,000 jobs a month. Our financial system was on the brink of collapse. Economists of every political stripe were saying we might be slipping into the next great depression.

And that's why, working with Nancy Pelosi and working with Harry Reid, we passed boldly and swiftly a Recovery Act that's made a difference in the lives of families and communities in every corner of the country. And California has been particularly hard hit. And I know families here are struggling more than folks in a lot of other parts of the country. And leaders are having to make tough choices about how to navigate through this economic storm. But I also know that if it hadn't been for that Recovery Act, here in California and all across America, if it weren't for the Recovery Act, we'd be in a much deeper hole, and that is a fact.

We put a tax cut in the pockets of small-business owners and 95 percent of working Americans, just as I promised on the campaign trail. That tax cut has benefited more than 12 million families here in California at a time when they were losing income and, in some cases, losing jobs. Increased unemployment insurance for 12 million Americans to help them get through tough times—that's helped nearly 2 million Californians. We made COBRA 65 percent cheaper to make sure that when you are out there looking for a job you could still have your health insurance. We provided relief to States like California so they wouldn't have to lay off teachers and firefighters and police officers. Gave 30,000 loans to small businesses all across America, including nearly 4,000 right here in California, that have helped to create and save tens of thousands of private sector jobs.

But the Recovery Act wasn't just about tax cuts—the most progressive, by the way, tax cuts in American history. It wasn't emergency relief for middle class families and working families who've borne the brunt of the recession. It also was the largest investment in education in American history. It was also the largest investment in clean energy in American history. It was also the largest investment in the Nation's infrastructure since Eisenhower built the Interstate Highway System back in the 1950s, putting people back to work all across the country rebuilding roads and bridges and waterways.

That's not all we did in those first few months. Nancy mentioned a few other things. We decided maybe it makes sense to pay women the same as men for the same work. And that's why we signed the Lilly Ledbetter, the first bill I had the honor to sign into law. Lifted the ban on stem cell research—[applause]—began to restore science to its rightful place here in America. Extended health insurance to 11 million children across the country who had been left out, under the Children's Health Insurance bill. Passed legislation to protect consumers from unfair rate hikes and abusive fees charged by credit card companies. Passed laws to protect our children from being targeted by big tobacco companies. Made sure that housing fraud was prevented. Placed a new national policy for the first time in our history aimed at both

increasing fuel economy and reducing greenhouse gas pollution for all new cars and trucks sold in the United States.

That's what we did here at home. Abroad, we began a new era of engagement. Working with partners to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and seek the long-term goal of a safer, more secure world free of nuclear weapons; working in concert with other nations on just about every continent to stem the global economic downturn and to confront climate change. We banned torture. We're closing Guantanamo. We're rebuilding our military. We're reaffirming our alliances. We are drawing down responsibly and ending the war in Iraq. We made good progress in taking the fight to Al Qaida, from Pakistan to Somalia to Indonesia. I went to Cairo on behalf of America to start a new dialog with the Muslim world.

So just in case you're wondering what we've been doing over the last 9 months—*[laughter]*—thought it might be useful to check in with you. *[Laughter]* You wouldn't always know it watching cable. *[Laughter]*

Audience member. Don't watch it!

The President. You said it, I didn't. *[Laughter]* But the reason you're here tonight, the reason I'm here tonight is because we know that our work isn't done. We still have enormous challenges in this country. There are far too many people out there who are really going through a tough time, out of work, seeing their hours trimmed, their wages cut, Americans who are subject to the whims of health insurance companies or who can't afford quality health insurance in the first place. Too many Americans who are seeing the American Dream slip further and further and further out of reach.

Part of what made our campaign exciting—you know, people tended to focus about—on our signs and hope. And, you know, it was easy to parody: "Oh, look, they're always talking about hope. They're so naive; they're so idealistic." You remember all that? *[Laughter]* "He'll never win." You remember that?

The reason the election motivated us was, yes, understanding that there's this huge gap between what America could be and what it was, right, a sense that we had to bridge that gap. But we knew change wasn't going to be easy. That wasn't what the campaign was about, this notion that somehow we figured we'd come in and after about 9 months, okay, we got that taken care of. *[Laughter]* That's not how the campaign worked. You remember us grinding that out? All those phone calls, all those knocking on doors, doors slammed in your faces, people couldn't pronounce my name. You remember that. That wasn't easy. So we didn't think that change was going to be easy.

But part of what was inspiring was understanding the effort that was going to be required. It gave us—it restored in us the sense that there are things that are worth fighting for, that there are things that are worth grinding it out, there are things that are worth taking some criticism for, that we're not just taking the easy road, that we're going to be responsible to make sure that the next generation has the kind of America that we all dream about. That's what the campaign was about.

So if there's anybody out there who's feeling a little disquiet—"Oh, gosh, people are being so mean"—*[laughter]*—for anybody who's thinking, well, maybe, you know, we're taking on—listen, I did not run for President and you did not work so hard to elect me and to make sure Nancy Pelosi was Speaker and Harry Reid was majority leader, you didn't work that hard to see me kick these problems down the road. You didn't support our cause because you wanted to pass on these problems to some future generation.

We came together because we know that now is the time to secure our future. Now is the time to build a clean energy economy that will free ourselves from the grip of foreign oil and generate new green jobs in the process, jobs that pay well and can't be outsourced. You knew that now is the time to transform our education system so that every single child in America can complete [compete]^{*} in this global economy. You knew that now was the time to place firm rules of the road so that banks can't game the system and the financial crisis on Wall Street doesn't end up hurting folks on Main Street. You know that now is finally the time to pass a health insurance bill that will provide coverage for every American and end some of the monkey business that these insurance companies engage in.

I don't have to tell you why the status quo is unsustainable. Seven million people in this State don't have health insurance. Millions more who do are seeing less stability, less security, higher premiums, less coverage. Premiums for California company—families who get insurance through their employer average more than \$13,000 a year. Over the past decade, family premiums have shot up by 114 percent in this State, more than double.

With costs so high, it's no wonder that less than half of all small businesses in California offer health care coverage to their workers. The proportion of hard-working Californians without insurance has been rising; the proportion of Californians who get insurance through the workplace has been declining.

We know those facts. Here's the thing: We are so close to moving past this status quo. We are closer than we have ever been to passing health insurance reform, health insurance reform that will finally make quality care affordable for people who don't have it and bring stability and security to people who do and slow the skyrocketing health care costs that are crushing our families and our businesses and our State and our Federal governments. That's the kind of reform that all of us need to support right now, Democrat and Republican.

But I know this is a Democratic event. And I want to talk to all of you just for a second. You know, there are going to be some fierce arguments over the next couple of weeks about health care. There should be. This is big. But understand that the bill you least like of the five bills that got passed would all provide billions [millions]^{*} of people who don't have coverage coverage, would all prevent insurance companies from barring you from getting health insurance because of a preexisting condition, would all set up an exchange so that small businesses could compete and get the same deal that big businesses do for their employees, would all provide subsidies to people who don't have health insurance and give them a measure of security—all of them.

So as we're going at it—and we're going to be going at it—[laughter]—I just want all of you to understand: We are going to get this done. We are going to get this done.

Now, to the non-Democrats who may be watching today—[laughter]—I want everybody to know, we believe in a strong and loyal opposition. I believe in a two-party system where ideas are tested and assumptions are challenged, because that's how we can move this country forward. But what I reject is when some folks decide to sit on the sidelines and root for failure on health care or on energy or on our economy. What I reject is when some folks say we should go back to the past policies when it was those very same policies that got us into this mess in the first place.

^{*} White House correction.

Another way of putting it is when, you know, I'm busy and Nancy busy with our mop cleaning up somebody else's mess, we don't want somebody sitting back saying, "You're not holding the mop the right way." Why don't you grab a mop? Why don't you help clean up? "You're not mopping fast enough." [Laughter] "That's a socialist mop." [Laughter] Grab a mop; let's get to work.

I think all of us in Washington have a greater purpose. We have a higher calling. And let me tell you, as long as I have the privilege of holding this office, I will do my very best to live up to my responsibilities to our country, to our children, to the future that we hold in common.

But I just want to remind you guys once again, because you're here tonight, you've invested a lot in this Democratic Party and invested in me, I want everybody to understand this is not going to be easy. It's not going to happen overnight. It's not going to happen in 9 months. It's not going to happen in 18 months. It's not going to happen in 36 months, some of the problems we're talking about.

Iraq was hard; Afghanistan is harder. There are—really are people out there who would be happy to blow up this room, wouldn't bat an eye. And we've got to deal with those folks. The dangers of nuclear proliferation are real, and it requires incredibly time-consuming, methodical negotiations in order to move us in a more peaceful direction.

I want everybody to know this, because I hope that the election was not just a fad.

Audience members. No!

The President. I hope that people didn't just think, well, that's done; that was fun; I really liked those posters. [Laughter]

I need you guys to understand that what we're trying to do is hard. And I want you to be excited by that. I want you to be energized by that, because if it was easy, it would have already been done. If it was easy, it wouldn't have been worth all the effort to get here. And I want everybody to know who are standing in the way of progress: I'm not tired; I'm just getting started. You can throw whatever you want at me—keep it coming—we're going to get this done. We're going to get health care done. We're going to get clean energy done. We're going to get climate change done. We're going to fix our schools. We are going to deal with the problems internationally that I was elected to deal with.

We are at a rare moment where we've been given the opportunity to remake our world for the better. And there's something about the American spirit, inherent in the American spirit: We don't hang on to the past. We always move forward. And that movement doesn't begin in Washington; it begins with you. It begins because the American people decide it's time to move forward. You decide it's time for change. And if you do that now, just as you did during the campaign, we are not only going to rebuild our economy, we are not only going to pass health care, but we're going to do what earlier generations have done. We are going to leave something better for our children, not just here in the United States, but all around the world.

So I hope that you aren't tired either, because I expect you to stand along with me as we get this business moving. Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8 p.m. at the Westin St. Francis hotel. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 16. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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